

AIDS ANTIBODY TESTING at Alternative Test Sites

A Program of the San Francisco
Department of Public Health

Information to help you make an informed
decision about whether or not to take the test.

Introducing the AIDS ANTIBODY TEST at Alternative Test Sites in San Francisco

The AIDS ANTIBODY TEST is available free of charge at Alternative Test Sites in San Francisco. This is a program of the San Francisco Department of Public Health. The AIDS antibody test detects the presence of antibodies to the AIDS virus by using a simple blood test. The test has been made available to keep potentially infectious blood out of the blood supply.

This is **not** a test for AIDS. The test does **not** tell you if you have AIDS or any AIDS Related Condition (ARC); it **does** show whether you have been infected with the virus which can cause AIDS.

Infection means that a virus has been retained in your body. If you are infected with the AIDS virus, your body will produce antibodies, which can be identified by the AIDS antibody test. You cannot be infected by casual contact with the virus. Infection can only occur when the virus is transmitted through intimate sexual contact, sharing needles, or blood transfusion.

Many people are concerned that they might face insurance or employment discrimination if the result of their test were revealed. Although the test is available at other locations, your anonymity is guaranteed if you take the test at an Alternative Test Site. You can get test results at Alternative Test Sites in San Francisco without losing your privacy or revealing your personal identity.

Your decision whether or not to take this test is a difficult one. You must decide for yourself. This publication provides information to help you make an *informed* decision. If you have questions which are not answered here or at the Alternative Test Site, contact the Bay Area Physicians for Human Rights (415-673-3189) or the San Francisco Medical Society (415-567-6234) for referral to a physician knowledgeable about AIDS, or call the San Francisco AIDS Foundation Hotline (415-863-AIDS).

Test Procedure At Alternative Test Sites

Anonymity is built into the Alternative Test Site system. You do not give your name, address, social security number or other official identification numbers.

To take the test at an Alternative Test Site you need to make an appointment by telephone beginning June 24, 1985 (call 415-621-4858 12-8 pm Monday-Friday). In San Francisco, the Alternative Test Sites are located at Health Centers 1, 2, and 5. The entire visit, including education, will take approximately one hour. You will need to return to the Alternative Test Site in person two weeks later to get your test result. The test and all education, counseling and referral services are free at Alternative Test Sites.

When you call to make an appointment for testing, an operator will give you an appointment number. This number cannot be traced back to you. When you go to the Alternative Test Site you will be given further information about the test. Afterwards, if you decide not to take the test, you may leave. If you decide to take the test, you will be given a new number to identify your blood sample. This number does not reveal your personal identity.

In two weeks you will return to the test site to get your test result. Upon presentation of your number, a health counselor will give you your test results and explain them to you in private. You will also receive a referral list in case you wish further attention.

To receive counseling after you take the test but before getting results, contact Community Mental Health Services (415-558-4387).

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality is an agreement that information about you will not be disclosed without your consent. Anonymity is a condition in which your personal identity is unknown to others. Your anonymity is guaranteed if you are tested at an Alternative Test Site. If you take the test anywhere else, your anonymity may not be guaranteed, except in some research programs.

Should I Take the Test?

Before you decide to take the test, stop for a moment to consider how you would feel if you received a positive result and how you would feel if you received a negative result. If you believe that you may be emotionally overwhelmed, you may not want to take the test.

The test will not tell you

- ▶ if you have AIDS or an AIDS Related Condition (ARC).
- ▶ if you will develop AIDS or ARC in the future.
- ▶ if you are immune to AIDS or ARC
- ▶ if you are healthy

People who do not want to know the result should not take the test. People who feel unwilling or unable to cope with the implications of the result should not take the test.

The following people should consider taking the test

- ▶ People who want to know if they're infectious.
- ▶ People who want information that can reinforce safe, healthful behavior.
- ▶ People who want to know if they have been infected with the AIDS virus through sexual contact, shared needles or transfusions.
- ▶ People considering pregnancy if one or both partners might be at risk for AIDS.

Whether or not you take the test, if you may be at risk for AIDS, you should not engage in practices which can transmit AIDS.

Test Results

And What They Mean

The AIDS antibody is a protein naturally produced in the body in response to the presence of the AIDS virus. The virus is called by several names: HTLV-III, LAV and ARV.

A positive test result indicates that the antibody *has* been found in your blood. A negative test result indicates that the antibody has *not* been found in your blood. The test is not completely accurate. A small percentage of people tested may be told that they have been infected by the virus when in fact they have not. In addition, a small percentage of people will receive a negative test result when in fact they have been infected with the virus.

A Positive Test Result

What a positive test does mean

- ▶ Your blood sample has been tested more than once and the tests indicate that antibodies to the AIDS virus are present.
- ▶ You have been infected with the AIDS virus and your body has produced antibodies.
- ▶ Researchers have shown that most people with AIDS antibodies have active virus in their bodies. *Therefore, assume you are contagious and capable of passing the virus on to others.*

What a positive test does not mean

- ▶ That you necessarily have AIDS or an AIDS Related Condition (ARC).
- ▶ That you will necessarily get AIDS or ARC. (You can reduce your chance of getting AIDS by avoiding further contact with the virus and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.)
- ▶ That you are immune to AIDS.

What you should do next

- ▶ Protect yourself from any further infection.
- ▶ Protect others from the virus by following AIDS precautions in sex, drug use and general hygiene.
- ▶ Consider seeing a physician for a complete health evaluation and advice on health maintenance.
- ▶ To improve your chances of staying healthy, avoid drugs and heavy alcohol use, maintain good nutrition, and avoid fatigue and stress.
- ▶ Do not donate blood, plasma, sperm, body organs or other tissue.

A Negative Test Result

If you test negative it means that no antibodies to the AIDS virus have been found in your blood at this time. There are three possible explanations for this.

- ▶ You have not been infected with the virus.
- ▶ You have had contact with the virus but have not become infected and therefore have not produced antibodies. However, repeated exposure to the AIDS virus will increase the likelihood that you will become infected.
- ▶ You have been infected by the virus but have not yet produced antibodies. Research indicates most people will produce antibodies within 2-8 weeks after infection. Some people will not produce antibodies for six months or more. A very small number of people will never produce antibodies.

If you test negative it does not mean

- ▶ That you have nothing to worry about. The AIDS epidemic has not yet peaked.
- ▶ That you are immune to the virus.
- ▶ That you have not been infected with the virus. You may have been infected and not yet produced antibodies.

How Is AIDS Transmitted?

AIDS is transmitted from person to person most commonly through sexual contact in the same manner as other sexually transmitted diseases or through direct blood to blood contact such as via shared needles. It is NOT transmitted through casual contact such as close proximity, sneezing or touching.

What Groups Are Known To Be at Risk for AIDS?

- Gay and bisexual men
- Intravenous drug users
- Hemophiliacs
- Women or men who have had unsafe sexual contact or have shared needles with someone who may have been infected with the AIDS virus
- Babies born to parents in any of the above groups
- People who received blood transfusions between 1979 and 1984 have a very slight risk of infection

In summary:

If you are currently healthy and you test positive:

- ▶ You will not necessarily develop AIDS or ARC.
- ▶ You *can* increase your chances of staying healthy.
- ▶ You are probably contagious and can spread the virus to others through sexual contact, blood donation, shared needles or pregnancy (to the unborn child).

If you are currently healthy and test negative:

- ▶ You are not protected from future infection or illness.
- ▶ You are probably free of the AIDS virus. If you have doubts about having yet produced antibodies, avoid contact with the virus, wait six months and be re-tested.

Whether you test positive or negative:

- ▶ Be careful. Don't contract or transmit the virus.
 - Follow safe sex guidelines in all risk situations.
 - Do not share needles.
- ▶ If you have any symptoms of AIDS or ARC, consult a physician or visit an AIDS screening clinic.
- ▶ Because the long-term consequences of infection by the AIDS virus are not known, we urge everyone to maintain adequate health insurance.

Recommendations for Avoiding Transmission of the AIDS Virus

Males and females, heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual, may acquire or transmit AIDS through intimate sexual contact. Condoms (rubbers) have been found effective in stopping other viruses such as herpes and cytomegalovirus (CMV). Their use is recommended. In risk

situations, no one should allow their semen, blood, urine, feces or vaginal secretions to enter the body of another person.

Personal implements such as razors and toothbrushes that could become contaminated with blood should not be shared.

If you decide to take the test in San Francisco, telephone 415-621-4858 12-8 pm Monday-Friday to make an appointment. For Alternative Test Site locations outside San Francisco, call the AIDS Hotline at 415-863-AIDS or 800-FOR-AIDS (in Northern California).

To receive an individualized health consultation or to participate in a support group, call the AIDS Health Project at 415-626-6637.

For further information about AIDS, contact the San Francisco AIDS Foundation Hotline (415-863-AIDS), or contact Bay Area Physicians for Human Rights (415-673-3189) or the San Francisco Medical Society (415-567-6234) for a referral to a physician knowledgeable about AIDS.

The information provided in these pages has been compiled by the San Francisco AIDS Foundation under contract from the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

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Hotline Information: 415-863-AIDS
in Northern California: 800-FOR-AIDS
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What happens when you become infected with the AIDS virus?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, a disease caused by a virus which breaks down a part of the body's immune system. This breakdown leaves the body vulnerable to a variety of unusual infections. Not everyone infected with the virus will develop AIDS. There are several possibilities:

- The majority of infected people will develop antibodies to the virus yet remain healthy. They will display none of the symptoms of AIDS. Research indicates that most people in this group can transmit the virus to others by shared needles or intimate sexual contact. The long term effect of infection in healthy, antibody-positive people is not known.
- A smaller group of people who are also antibody-positive will develop some of the symptoms of AIDS. These people are diagnosed as having an AIDS Related Condition (ARC). They may exhibit mild to severe symptoms such as swollen lymph nodes, unexplained, persistent diarrhea, unintentional weight loss, mild or intermittent fever, drenching night sweats, fatigue, and/or yeast and fungus infections.
- An unknown percentage of infected, antibody-positive people will develop AIDS. A diagnosis of AIDS is made only after finding specific life-threatening infections or malignancies that do not normally occur in healthy people. The two most common diseases associated with AIDS are Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP) and Kaposi's sarcoma (KS).

